

A HISTORY OF THE WOODLAWN COMMUNITY

By

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John C. Fremont crossed Nemaha County in 1842. He entered south of Sabetha and headed northwest to Seneca. The trail cut back and forth due to Fremont's lack of knowledge as to where water holes were and the terrain of the land. With some modifications, the road was followed again in 1848 by the Mormons and then again in 1849 by the California gold seekers. The military started using the road to deliver supplies from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to Fort Kearney, Nebraska. The road went through Granada (Pleasant Springs) on to Log Chain and from there to Seneca.

In 1857, General Albert Sidney Johnston was sent west with military troops to quiet the Mormon uprising. He crossed a marshy creek with great difficulty, where Log Chain is located today. From 24 to 38 yoke of oxen were used to pull the military wagons across this creek. In doing so, chain after chain broke, giving the location its name-Log Chain.

By 1849, the road had been laid out, and by 1858 it was established as the Overland Trail.

On July 2, 1859, the first stage departed Leavenworth, to cross over this trail. This was the beginning of the largest stage company of the country. In 1860, the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company replaced the old Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Company. The owners were John S. Jones, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors and William B. Waddell.

Robert Sewell's home (Old Bob Ridley as he was known on the trail) is said to have been Log Chain Ranch. Bob was a stage driver on the eastern division of the Overland Trail and is said to have killed three Indians and wounded a dozen more when they tried to take over his stage at Cottonwood Springs, Nebraska. Bob retired to Wetmore and he and his wife operated the Overland Stables and the Overland Hotel until he died in Wetmore in the 1880's.

April of 1860 brought with it one of the most historical adventures of the Old West-the Pony Express. The ponies traveled the Overland Trail and Log Chain became the 7th relay station of this historic period. The pony riders could get mail from Granada, Kansas, to Placerville, California, in 7 to 10 days as compared with 14 days by stage. This was accomplished by 80 riders and 500 horses. The cost of sending a letter was 10¢ for a government postage stamp and \$1.00 for a Pony Express stamp for a one ounce letter. This low cost resulted in a loss for the company. When the Pony Express first began, it charged \$5.00 for a half ounce letter.

One of the most important messages carried by the Pony Express was a copy of Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address. It was carried from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in 7 days and 17 hours.

One of the riders was Don C. Rising, who came to Kansas in 1858 with his family. His father, N.H. Rising, built the Log Chain cabin in 1861. The ranch is located at the crossing of the old military road and Log Chain Creek, a tributary of Muddy Creek. The pretentious house was built 24 x 40 feet and the barn was built 70 feet long. The Log Chain Creek was marshy and with the addition of a buffalo wallow, it was difficult for a wagon to cross. As stated earlier, a large number of teams were often needed to pull wagons and artillery through this crossing. The station served as a stopover for the travelers of the Oregon Trail. (The branch of the Oregon Trail that comes from St. Joseph is the Old Military or Overland Trail.) It served as a store and inn with the accommodations of a cemetery in the southwest part of the ranch where pioneers were buried.

The location of Log Chain was chosen because of the abundant water supply. A local legend claims that Log Chain served as a station of the underground railroad. "Local residents remember a large stone cave dug in the hillside with benches on each side."¹ Abraham Lincoln is said to have been at Log Chain, but historians contradict this.

In 1862, Ben Holladay purchased the stage line and renamed it the famous Overland Stage Line. Holladay took over the mail business as well as the stage business. He ran the famous Concord Coaches of four and six horse teams. He worked this business with 3,000 horses and mules with eight to twelve animals at each station. A fare of \$125 was charged for a trip from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Denver, Colorado, and \$225 to Sacramento, California.

In his freighting business, Holladay used 8,000 men, 6,000 heavy wagons and 75,000 oxen. The peak years of traffic on the trail were 1865 and 1866 with the last stage running in 1867.

The end of the Civil War brought many veterans west. They could homestead land and use their time in service to act as time toward homesteading. The early settlers in Nemaha County often built log cabins or dug dugouts. There were enough trees in eastern Kansas to allow the settlers to build log cabins. The dugouts consisted of two main types; a cave dug into the side of a steep hill or a pit dug on level ground and covered with a roof.

West of Granada, there was one dug in a hill near the present road leaving Granada. Northwest of Woodlawn on the John McFall farm an example of the pit type was located. Granada and Capioma were two of the first settlements in eastern Nemaha County. David Locknane was one of the first settlers of Granada township. He and Samuel Magill built the first log houses in Granada. Locknane later built a hotel at Granada and operated it from 1860 to 1864. It is said that Jim Lane was a frequent guest at the hotel. Capioma, a settlement about ten miles south of Sabetha, was platted in 1857, however, there wasn't any place to record the plat so it wasn't recorded until July 9, 1859. Capioma's first settlers were Samuel Magill, William Barnes, James McCallister, B.F. Hicks and Robert Rea. The town was named after an Indian chief. The first school house in Capioma was built in 1857. A hotel was erected in 1859 by Walter R. Gage who also served as postmaster, notary public and Justice of the Peace. In 1876 the hotel burned and was a total loss. Later, a general store was built by J.H.H. Ford. In 1866, a steam saw mill was started by John Waler. By 1887 a two-story stone building housed a medical and surgical infirmary. There were also two churches - Methodist and Congregational. William Robinson is also said to have operated a saw mill and blacksmith shop near Capioma after the town of Lincoln died.

James D. Magill of Capioma came from Missouri by ox wagon and broke up the prairie by oxen. He lived in a log cabin one mile north of Capioma.

Joshua Bushnell was born on December 25, 1825. He came to Capioma Township in 1869 and paid \$825 for a quarter section of land. He built a one-story adobe house and later built a two-story stone house. The basement was fitted for culinary use and the roof was the mansard type. This stone house still stands north of Capioma.

Samuel Magill settled on 320 acres of land southeast of Woodlawn. He began in a shanty that was 14 foot square with hardly a dollar to his name. He worked diligently and built one of the most prosperous farms and orchards in Capioma Township. On this farm, Magill had a large walnut grove. Through the years, walnut lumber was taken from this grove and sent to England for the production of furniture for the royalty. Along with Magill's farming activities was the annual picnic held on his farm. The first picnic was held in 1860 and the last in 1916 when Magill died. This annual picnic was considered to be the most successful and most faithfully attended gathering in the Woodlawn area.

Included among the guests were the following Sunday Schools: Bethany, Capioma, Comet, Granada and Woodlawn, along with the towns of Wetmore and Sabetha. The young boys played ball, the men talked of farming, the women set out their individual family picnic lunches and the children bought Clyde Buck and Ed Stalcup's ice cream and soda pop. Ice cream was sold for 5¢ a dish.

Hugh R. Magill came to Capioma Township in 1856. He served as a representative and judge of elections (Free State) when Capioma voted on the Lecompton Constitution. Only two votes were cast. By 1883 Capioma consisted of only a general store, a blacksmith shop and a hotel. In 1910, population had decreased to 45.

By 1871, people had begun to settle in Nemaha County. Schools were being built and people were working toward a better tomorrow. On March 18, 1871, the community voted to build a school two miles north and a quarter of a mile west of Woodlawn. It was to be Maple Ridge School, District 48. On October 17, 1871, bonds were issued by the Regents of Agricultural College at Manhattan, Kansas.

The first school year at Maple Ridge was three months in length. In the early days, the school year was divided up to take advantage of the time when children weren't needed on the farm. The ages of the students ranged from 7 to 21 years of age. The school consisted of grades one through eight.

The school was erected about a quarter-mile west and an eighth-mile east of where Earl Reed's house is today. The building was built entirely of wood at a cost of \$500.00. Some of the expenses for the school were: \$97.50 for 12 student's desks and seats and one teacher's desk; \$27.50 for a stove and fixtures; \$2.00 for rock for the foundation; \$2.35 for three-quarters cord of firewood; \$24.50 for three cord of wood and 100 oak posts. There were eight taxpayers responsible for financing the building of the school: S.P. Conrad, Neal Ford, William Johnson, James Luther, William McCoy, John McFall, Dennis McNergney and John Smith. The first teacher was Mary Todd who was paid at a salary of \$30.00 a month. She was to teach ten students the first year for three months. The mailing address was Capioma where the neighboring settlers went for mail and supplies.

A few years later rumors of a railroad coming to Capioma Township from Atchison began. A doctor by the name of William L. Challiss bought land in and around the present site of Woodlawn.

In the summer of 1881, Dr. Challiss erected a steam flour mill on the banks of Muddy Creek, that runs through Woodlawn. The mill was four stories high and also had a basement. The machinery for it consisted of a hundred horsepower steam engine and four sets of burrs. The manager was J.W. Burt. Dr. Challiss also built himself a log cabin about a quarter-mile south of the mill where the Lierz farm is today. The lawn of the cabin was heavily wooded and it is said that from this wooded lawn came the name of the future town of Woodlawn.

The mill brought in a good deal of business and from this the community started. A general store was built by W.N. Taylor. A private post office was set up in the store in 1881 and changed to a government Post Office in 1882 with Paul Challiss acting as the Postmaster. On the second floor, Taylor had a public auditorium that was called the Woodlawn Hall. A drug store was opened by Dr. J. B. West and a nine room hotel was opened by Albert Yost (The Lancaster House).

Other businesses that started were a millinery shop, blacksmith shop, shoe store and a brick yard. At different times there were three stores, two churches and a school. With all of these businesses and the favorable location between Wetmore and Sabetha, the future looked prosperous for the town. "Woodlawn has, undoubtedly, unlike so many of its neighbors, a permanent lease of life."²

The Woodlawn school (District 24) records go back to 1883. The one room school's first teacher was A. S. Newlon, who was paid a salary of \$45.00 a month. The school grew with the town and finally became a three teacher school. It continued until the state unification law forced it to close in 1966.

Some time in the late 1890's or the early 1900's the two-story general store caught fire and burned down. In 1901, Emil Jonach decided to build a new store east and across Walnut Street from the old one. This was the last store to conduct business in Woodlawn. It closed about 1958. Some of the operators during the years were Aaron McRoberts, the Humphrey Brothers,